

**A Theology of Health, Healing and Wholeness**

**Lisa M. Beardsley**

**Loma Linda University**

**Loma Linda, CA 92350 USA**

**[lbeardsley@llu.edu](mailto:lbeardsley@llu.edu)**

**June 24, 2002**

**Presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> Faith and Learning Seminar, Sahmyook University, Seoul, Korea.**

## **A Theology of Health, Healing and Wholeness**

Lisa M. Beardsley

### A Fatal Crack

Christmas was special because my mother, brothers, and sisters and their children all came from around the country to our home. Our Christmas dinner was festive. My sisters helped with the cooking and all of our favorite dishes were on the table. My mother, a Finn, made the childhood comfort food that we all loved growing up: Finnish mashed potatoes. The mashed potatoes were the crowning addition to the Christmas dinner feast. They were our mother's love turned into fluffy white mounds. It was an extravagant idea but I decided to serve them from a Waterford crystal pedestal bowl that had been a farewell gift to us some years ago. Until that day, it had only held flower-petal potpourri.

But now on Christmas Day, how those mashed potatoes glittered splendidly in the Waterford crystal bowl! Dinner was wonderful. We ate, talked, laughed and ate some more. Very little was left at the end of the meal. My sisters and I chatted and washed up the dishes afterwards. Sunlight glinted on the crystal bowl now washed and waiting to be dried. In the sunlight, to my horror, I saw what looked like a crack in the pedestal base. I called my sister over. She confirmed the crack. When we lifted the bowl to inspect it closer, the entire bowl lifted off the pedestal, leaving a 5-inch gaping hole in the bottom of the bowl. The bowl had cracked completely off of the base.

Hoping that it was a manufacturing defect, my youngest sister took it to the Waterford crystal shop in a neighboring city. The manager took one look at it and said, "That's a heat crack.

Somebody put something hot in that bowl.” Indeed! Mounds and mounds of fluffy, hot, steamy mashed potatoes.

He continued, “You should never put anything into crystal warmer than tepid temperature.”

How very much like that pricey crystal is our health. It is taken for granted until it is broken. Its value is seen only after it’s broken.

Another aspect of brokenness in our lives is death. When my grandmother died, I experienced a physical sensation. It felt as though a ligament or bone had pulled out from its socket. I felt a physical dislocation that could not be put back into place. Death disconnects us from those we love and with whom we share a common heritage.

The San Francisco cathedral in Lima, Peru has underground catacombs that are the final resting place for the bones of 20,000 people. Only skulls and large femur bones remain, sprinkled with lime. In one deep brick circle, there is a grim design of bones. Skulls are piled in the center. Long thighbones radiate out, like the petals of a morbid flower. These petals are ringed by more skulls, and a collar of more thighbones. The air is cool and utterly silent in the dark catacombs. In the black stillness hanging over the rows of bones is a world completely disconnected from the traffic, sirens, car horns and bustle of Lima above ground.

Cracked crystal, broken bones. Disintegration and loss saturate the fabric of life. Sin is loss of human wholeness. Hairline weaknesses unseen by the eye respond to heat and stress by cracking. It is painful and depressing to be broken. Why are we broken? Often, it is the result of our own choices. We choose unhealthy practices and take foolish risks. But we are also affected by the choices of others. Their choices impact us. We are the victims of their bad choices. We are born into the cumulative burden of sin, from Adam to those of our parents, they are layered like black lacquer over what once was “very good.” This disintegrating, fragmenting force

simultaneously affects persons and their capacity for relationship with people, the environment, and God. The power of choice is used in deconstructive ways.

More significant than the choices of others or self is the randomness and irrationality of sin. In these instances, no one made a thoughtless, ignorant, or immoral decision; it's just the randomness and irrationality of sin. This is the lesson of John 9 and the story of the man born blind. As Jesus walked along a road, he saw a man blind from birth. "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' "Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' Having said this, he healed the man.

Christ's miracles were windows to the future and a deeper level of reality. They preview what it will be like when God's kingdom comes. They also point to what God is doing now. Ellen White (1942) comments, "The Savior in his miracles revealed the power that is continually at work in man's behalf, to sustain and to heal him. Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive and to restore us."

### Healing and Integration

Can we experience wholeness today? Yes--Jesus is still in the business of healing. God still heals and restores health. This involves integration of the component parts in our person.

Healing brings about harmony among the parts. Wong (2002) provides an example:

In a full orchestra, you have the strings section (violins on the left, violas, cello on the right, woodwinds in the front center, behind it the brass section, and at the back the percussion drums. Sometimes you also have a choir. So it is with our person. There are many dimensions that make up our person, the spiritual sphere, the mento-intellectual attributes, the physical dimension, the psychologico-emotional component, the relational aspect, the socio-cultural extension. A good orchestra is made up of colorful string sections, bright brasses, clear woodwinds, stirring percussion support, and a magnificent choir, all working harmoniously to reflect the conductor's vision and his master directorship. For the

**Christian, God through His Spirit, is the conductor to integrate all the different dimensions of our being into the state of wholeness to which we aspire.** (p. 187, italics in original text)

Wong then observes that in this orchestra the sum is greater than the parts and one dimension can, to a certain extent, compensate for another domain. Thus, an amputee “physically speaking, is not whole in an organic sense, but she can still be whole and functional in another sense....the person, even though she is bedridden or with all lower limbs amputated, could still reach that particular destination [to bring the good tidings of Isaiah 52:7] through her letters, email, phone calls, thoughts, prayers in order to make contact with another person and to bring comfort, peace and joy.” Like an old but still functional cathedral, such a person “stands whole in image, in symbolism, in its coherent statement of spiritual emphasis and its call to a higher reality.” (p. 188)

The strange story of a valley full of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a prophecy of the resurrection and points to eschatological wholeness of persons, society, and the earth made new. It is also an illustration of the healing power that God’s Spirit brings to our lives now. It’s not just pie in the sky by and by, but also some on the plate while you wait. There will be a resurrection but in the meantime, God’s Spirit brings healing to our brokenness and hope in the midst of death. It could just as well have happened in the catacombs of Lima, but at that time, the Lord set Ezekiel in the middle of a valley that was full of bones. Ezekiel recounts:

He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach

tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

The only real merit in describing the extent and pervasiveness of sin and brokenness is to provide the context for the extravagance and comprehensiveness of God’s work of redemption. It is the work of redemption to make men whole and to restore in us and all creation the image of God. Rice (1999) describes this as occurring along two dimensions: the vertical and the horizontal. The relationship to others and to our environment is healed. The relationship between humans and God is also restored in the vertical dimension.

In *Making Men Whole*, Phillips (1952) observes that wholeness is achieved in three defined stages. After seeing himself “as a personality in conflict with itself,” the love of God first reconciles him to His Father, and then enables him to realize his true self so that “by the power of God’s Spirit within him, he is able to stand and grow and work as a whole man, though obviously at any given time he is far from realizing God’s complete plan for him.” (pp. 66-67). In the second stage, the need for fellow Christians and their need of him are realized. As members of the body of Christ with a diversity of gifts but the same Spirit, “it is only by true fellowship and cooperation with others that any kind of wholeness can come into being in the local community.” The third stage is “to realize, not in theory but in practice, that in this world that God has made the various races, with their particular contributions” to make the “one new man.” This is healing along the horizontal plane.

The fourth stage that Phillips describes is to develop the capacity to live this life with the eye set on eternity. He invites, “But supposing this life is the preparatory school, the experimental stage, the probationary period, the mere prelude to real living on such a wide and magnificent scale that the imagination reels at the thought of it—then what exciting hopes invade our hearts!...It is against such a solid and reliable background that we are called to live as strangers and pilgrims in this evil and imperfect world....The highest, the best and the most satisfying thing that we can do is to ask to be allowed to cooperate with God’s infinite patience in making men whole.” (pp. 72-73). Likewise, White’s pivotal book, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, outlines the scope within which the work of redemption is enacted. This perspective shows that redemption expands to encompass the unfallen universes that now watch the cosmic drama unfold to reveal the character of God and the true nature of Satan and sin.

That redemption is for all of creation and not just for humans shows how expansive and complete it is. “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8:19-23, NIV). Healing is for persons, nations, creation itself, and even of the rift caused by Satan’s challenge of who God is.

The remainder of this discussion will focus on how we, as educators, may participate in God’s work of redemption in the lives of our students.

#### How Educators Can Facilitate Wholeness in Students

There are four means by which educators can foster wholeness in students: fostering integration, modeling integration, caring, and fostering relationships. As discussed elsewhere (Beardsley, 2002) the educator has the role of educating students about what is, as well as how to come to know what is. The educator who limits teaching to the subject without relating it to the whole of life does an inadequate task of teaching. The very opening statements to *Education* casts a broad net:

Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.” (White, 1903, p. 13).

The Physical Therapy Assistant at Loma Linda University does this through a program called Wholeness Incorporated Now (WIN). Its purpose is to help students in the Physical Therapy



Assistant program develop habits that balance life by nurture of physical, mental, spiritual, and social domains (a minimum of 3 hrs/wk for credit). By engaging in 3 hours of activity in each of four domains every week, provided that their total grade is not a failing one, students are able to add points to their final course grade. They must engage in 3 hours each of physical exercise, mental/intellectual activity (such as writing a poem or reading a classic book), emotional/social activities (activities that strengthen relationships with family and friends), and spiritual/community activities (such as attending church or engaging in personal devotions). Students learn that part of becoming physical therapy assistants is learning how to feed and nurture each of their parts: body, mind, heart, and spirit.

I have elsewhere (Beardsley, 2002) discussed the role of the educator to foster a relationship among content area, an interpersonal environment that nurtures learning (Palmer, 1998), and with God. Beyond that is to take the risk of being vulnerable to and the opportunity to care for students, especially when they need it. In commenting on the extent to which caregivers should commit themselves emotionally to patients, Richard Rice (1999) comments,

Surely a caretaker who refused to respond emotionally to a person in need would be a contradiction in terms. For how could such a person provide 'care' in any significant way?" On the other hand, one wonders how a person who spends herself unstintingly in caring for others could avoid running out of emotional energy long before her responsibilities are fulfilled. Perhaps the solution is not to keep from spending oneself emotionally, but to find ways of replenishing one's emotional resources. (p. 59)

This applies as surely to educators and others who give unstintingly of themselves. It costs to care! Several years ago I interviewed a 34-year old man who was then director of a humanitarian aid agency in South America. For ten years he worked energetically in alleviating disasters and human suffering in Africa and South America. At that time, he oversaw a \$10 million dollar budget and distributed 14 million tons of food. I asked for his secret for success in such

demanding work that reels from one crisis of human need to the next. His answer? A weekly Sabbath rest and a one-month vacation with his wife and two little girls. Rest and the company of friends and family underlie emotional health.

From the world of professional bodybuilders, we learn a startling fact: building muscles requires exercise AND rest! Continuous exercise tears muscle down. To build muscle, different muscle groups are worked on alternate days so that rest balances exercise.

When I was in graduate school, my roommate asked me, "How can you afford to take a day off from study?" The library at Loma Linda University closes Friday afternoon, remains closed on Saturdays, and reopens on Sunday. When it was closed, she would go to the library of a nearby university to study on Saturday. I worried that I might not do well with a day's less study but years later, I have come to the realization that I CANNOT afford not to have the Sabbath! The Sabbath is an unparalleled integrator of physical, mental, social, and spiritual domains. Rest from the dailyness of our activity and from the burden of concern is an obvious benefit of the Sabbath. Contemplation of the Eternal expands the mind like nothing else can, putting into perspective our concerns and lives. The assurance of God's love and support by fellow-believers knit together emotional and social health. Praise, worship, prayer, and Bible study build spiritual health and vibrancy.

There is a rhythm to life, a rhythm of rest and work. Agriculture illustrates this lesson. There is a time to sow and a time to let grow. The Sabbath is a time for enjoying relationships, afternoon napping, and eating with family and friends. It is for enjoying relationships, worshipping God, relaxing in nature. It is a weekly reminder that who we are is more important than what we can do, and that life is more than work. The Sabbath on a weekly basis, and Jesus on a daily basis heal the fracture lines and reintegrate the broken pieces of our lives.

### Why Wholeness?

To have health and wholeness is to realize the divine plan that God has for us. It is God's will that we grow in health and wholeness. This self-actualization is not in the narcissistic way of humanism, but in a way that contributes to the wholeness of others. Furthermore, when we are in the bloom of health and happiness, we are better able to help others.

### How am I doing?

As an educator, it is critical to ask, "How am I doing?" As children observe and model parents, so students observe and model after their teachers. Analysis of the quadrants described in the WIN program earlier is appropriate. Body, mind, spirit, and social domains—how am I doing? Evaluate the balance and harmony among domains. The answer may also be found in analysis of symptoms such as illness, depression, hopelessness, or loneliness. Symptoms are clues. "Teacher, teach thyself!" is a prerequisite for teaching others.

I conclude with a statement, a question and a challenge. The Whole Life is a balanced, integrated life. What would bring about greater balance and integration of the pieces of your life? What can you do in teaching your discipline to foster wholeness in your students?

References:

- Beardsley, L. M. (June 21, 2002). *Theories of Intelligence and Epistemology and the Role of the Educator*. Invited presentation, 30<sup>th</sup> Faith and Learning Seminar, Seoul, Korea.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Phillips, J. B. (1952). *Making men whole*. NY: The Macmillan Co.
- Rice, R. (1999). *Wholeness, health and healing: Toward a theology of healing*. (Occasional paper), Loma Linda: Loma Linda University, The Center for Spiritual Life and Wholeness.
- White, E. G. (1903). *Education*. Mountain View: CA. Pacific Press Publishing Assoc.
- White, E. G. (1950). *The great controversy between Christ and Satan*. Mountain View: CA. Pacific Press Publishing Assoc.
- White, E. G. (1942). *Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View: CA. Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 112-13.
- Wong, John B. (2002). *Christian Wholism: Theological and Ethical Implications in the Postmodern World*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.